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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #7323 2841511  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 111511Z OCT 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9429  
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9397  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT LIMA 5489  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6091  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4108  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS BOGOTA 007323

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TRANSPARENT ELECTION PROCESS AND GREATER POLITICAL  
SPACE IN APARTADO

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. Local candidates and officials in Apartado (Antioquia department) told us preparations for the October elections are proceeding in a transparent manner. Local candidates said the current environment allowed a broader "political space" to campaign freely and had few complaints about how local officials are handling the election process. The candidates have not received threats and are satisfied with the level of security provided by local police. Vote-selling by campesinos remains a concern, but candidates and officials did not expect the practice to significantly affect the outcome of the elections. End Summary.

¶2. Poloff traveled to Apartado on September 20, to meet with the local Registrar, the Mayor's office, local police and candidates for the Mayoral race from the U party, Polo Democratico Alternativo, the Liberal Party, the Movimiento Colombia Viva, and Colombia Democratica.

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POLITICAL SPACE, TRANSPARENT PROCESS  
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¶3. Candidates for the Mayor's office in Apartado stressed the open nature of the elections, saying each candidate has been able to run a smooth campaign. Though candidates from Polo Democratico and the U party both expressed concern over campaign financing, both referred to money coming from legitimate companies and not illegal groups. The candidates said they seen no sign of any influence from illegal armed actors within the city. They stressed that selling votes is a historical practice that is widespread. Though some illegal groups may buy votes outside the city in rural areas, it would likely have a minimal impact on the overall outcome.

¶4. The Office of the Registrar said there are 134,000 habitants of Apartado, but only 63,000 possess the valid cedula (government identification cards) needed to vote. Of this number, a portion (number unknown) have fled Apartado due to violence, and would likely not return to vote. It is the voters' responsibility to change the registration of their cedula to vote in their new location. There is no absentee process in Colombia. The Office of the Registrar estimates that 10% of eligible voters live outside the city of Apartado in rural areas (including San Jose de Apartado) and of this number, only 50% are likely to vote. This is in line with national (45%) and departmental (46.5%) voting rates in past elections. There are currently ten candidates running for Mayor, and the Registrar has received no

complaints of threats against candidates.

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SECURITY A CONCERN, BUT CANDIDATES ARE CONTENT  
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¶5. Violence against candidates has been an issues in the past, but the candidates in Apartado uniformly stated they have been happy with the security provided by the local police. Captain Vega of the Apartado police meets regularly with both the candidates and the Office of the Registrar to monitor and evaluate security risks, providing roving patrols and bodyguards to those that need or request them. None of the candidates believes there will be significant violence in Apartado during the election process. Still, security at polling places is a concern in many rural areas.  
Brownfield